12 September 2002
English
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Committee on Conferences
Substantive session of 2002

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Ms. Radhia **Achouri** (Tunisia)

IV. Translation- and interpretation-related matters

A. Use of remote interpretation

Introduction and overview

1. In paragraph 108 of its report to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session,[1] the Committee on Conferences requested the Secretariat to assess future advances in the videoconferencing and communications areas to determine whether they could offer solutions to the outstanding technical problems of remote interpretation. In paragraph 109, it also requested that a report on developments in those areas, as well as any activities in the field of remote interpretation carried out by other international organizations, be submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session.

2. At its 445th meeting, on 11 September 2002, the Committee on Conferences considered the report of the Secretary-General on videoconferencing and remote interpretation, which was contained in the consolidated report of the Secretary-General entitled "Pattern of conferences".[2]

Discussion

3. Note was taken of the outstanding problems related to remote interpretation, including image interruptions and the lack of synchronization between sound and image in integrated services digital network (ISDN) transmissions. While members expressed satisfaction with the quality of the sound and images during the videoconference held earlier in the meeting with duty stations away from

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 32* (A/56/32).
[2] A/57/228, paras. 93-105.

Headquarters, videoconferencing did not offer technical solutions to the technical problems of remote interpretation. As a concept, however, remote interpretation remained on the table, although it was still not part of the general picture in international organizations.

4. The view was expressed that the issue of remote interpretation should be examined in the context of a comprehensive study that would assess the impact of the introduction of new technologies on the working conditions of interpreters, including their ability to interact with speakers.

Conclusions and recommendations

5. **The Committee noted that, while problems related to the transmission quality of a point-to-point or point-to-multipoint communications link remained, it was likely that in two or three years, the present, less expensive, routinely used ISDN-based videoconferencing technology would be able to solve them and that the remaining problems related to image quality would also be solved.**

6. **The Committee looked forward to the results of the comprehensive cost-benefit analysis on the use of remote interpretation, which would be finalized when important information regarding the impact of remote interpretation on the working conditions of interpreters was obtained, together with an evaluation of its impact on the quality of the services provided by the interpreters of the Organization.**

B. Utilization of new technologies

7. This item is considered in combination with section V "Information technology".

C. Language service posts

1. Temporary assistance posts

8. The Committee was informed that a report would be issued on the conversion of some temporary assistance posts under the agenda item entitled "Programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003".

2. Employment of retirees

9. The Committee was informed that updated information on the subject had been requested under the agenda item entitled "Human resources management".

3. Employment of interpreters with desired language combinations

Introduction and overview

10. In section IV, paragraph 3, of its resolution 56/242, the General Assembly approved for an initial period of one year an internal training initiative targeting near-successful candidates in the interpreters' competitive examination who were close to performing at the requisite level but needed additional training.

11. At its 445th meeting, on 11 September 2002, the Committee on Conferences considered the report of the Secretary-General concerning the employment of interpreters with desired language combinations, which was contained in the consolidated report of the Secretary-General entitled "Pattern of conferences".[3]

Discussion

12. It was recalled that the previous year the Committee had supported the training initiative that had been proposed to improve the staffing situation in terms of certain language combinations in the Interpretation Service. Over the long term, it would be less costly to train candidates who could then fill vacant posts than to have recourse to temporary assistance. The whole question of the competitiveness of the Organization's remuneration package should also be examined, since remuneration must be attractive in order to attract qualified candidates. It was noted in that connection that the Organization did not observe the Noblemaire Principle, according to which the salaries of international civil servants should be based on those of the comparator civil service.

Conclusions and recommendations

13. **The Committee noted with satisfaction the results of the first training exercise, which had taken place in 2001, and supported the continuation of the initiative.**

14. **The Committee noted with satisfaction that it had been possible in the current biennium to implement the programme within existing resources.**

[3] Ibid., paras. 109-117.

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V. Information technology

Introduction and overview

1. At its 444th, 445th and 446th meetings, the Committee on Conferences considered the report of the Secretary-General on pattern of conferences (A/57/228), paragraphs 118 to 139, on information technology, and the report of the Secretary-General on improving the performance of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services (A/57/289), paragraphs 41 to 48, on optimizing the use of technology.

2. The Committee learned that the major changes that had come about since the previous year's report on information technology involved, first and foremost, a new policy approach that put information technology in the forefront. A policy decision had been made to move towards complete electronic processing of information. In that context, an important new project was the introduction of the digital recording system to replace dictaphones. Since the Information Management and Technology Unit had become essential to the progress of the Department, it was to be transferred from the Executive Office to the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management and its functions would be broadened to cover a full range of information and communications technology services.

Discussion

3. The Committee emphasized that it was essential for the Organization to keep abreast of cutting-edge technology. Information technology in particular would have an impact on global management.

4. In response to concerns expressed, the Secretariat reassured the Committee that all the projects of the Department were part of the overall information technology plan of the Organization, thus avoiding fragmentation of the process. Some technology projects would be implemented within the context of the capital

master plan, although it might be found advisable to move the schedule for some projects forward.

5. Regarding the timing of some changes, it was explained that the new format of the *Journal* with electronic links appeared on the first day of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly and the technology would eventually be extended to other duty stations.

6. In response to questions about the projected costs, it was explained that, on the basis of very rough estimates, the Department expected the proposals and projects described in the two reports to be cost-neutral overall, with some shifting of personnel and resources.

7. Questions were raised about the relative merits of the Documents Control and Productivity Monitoring System (DCPMS) used at the United Nations Office at Vienna and the e-DRITS system used in New York.

8. A number of delegations expressed satisfaction about the manifest improvement in the technical quality of videoconferencing and enthusiasm for its potential cost-saving applications. It was mentioned that the Secretary-General was to prepare a report on videoconferencing applicable to the Organization as a whole.

9. Interest was expressed in a cost analysis of a global database for interpreters, text processors and translators.

Conclusions and recommendations

10. **The Committee welcomed the updated information contained in the report on a number of information technology projects and requested the Secretariat to implement them as soon as possible and to report the following year on the progress that had been made. As the report of the Secretary-General on improving the performance of the Department made clear, information technology projects were crucial to achieving the goal of servicing Member States more efficiently. The Committee underlined the need to give priority to projects that had the potential for improving department-wide productivity without sacrificing quality.**

11. **The Committee emphasized that it was important for the Department's projects to dovetail with the overall technology plan of the Organization and to fit within the context of the capital master plan.**

12. **The Committee stressed that information technology was essential in achieving integrated global management of conference services.**

13. **The Committee requested the Secretariat to study the relative merits of the document tracking systems currently in use in the different duty stations and the possibility of combining the best features of each.**

14. **The Committee also requested the Secretariat to make more extensive use of videoconferencing in meetings, in view of the manifest improvements in the technology, in order to increase the contact between intergovernmental bodies and Secretariat officials posted away from Headquarters, while achieving cost savings.**